

2005/Feb LYDIA MONKS - Publishing News

Lydia Monks is a no-time-to-be-bored kind of person. With a baby due in May, you might think she would be taking things a little easier at her home in Sheffield. But no, she has three books and the roughs for a fourth to be delivered before her due date, and sounds calm about the whole thing. "It is quite hectic," she admits, "but really nothing to do with the baby, it's always like this...like to be busy and I am quite organised."

Monks, who trained at Kingston, always wanted to work in children's publishing but on leaving college found that, like many before her, getting a foothold in the industry wasn't that easy. "I went to see so many publishers and they all said they were interested, and keen on what I did, but I don't think they knew how to use me and had problems tying me in with an author." To put food on the table she turned to editorial work, illustrating for the likes of the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Evening Standard*.

"I was really lucky, I got work straight out of College but it wasn't the kind of work that suited me; it's very fast turn-around and you never really know what's coming next. Magazines like *Tatler* would use me and I'd have something there and something in *Just 17* every month. People were quite good at giving me a chance, and I had plenty of published work, but nothing in children's books." To solve her problem, Monks decided she wouldn't wait for a publisher to find her a writer and sat down to come up with her own story.

"And that's when the trouble started - no one wanted it! I went to see a fairly well-known author who told me I shouldn't be showing it to anyone, as it wouldn't do me any favours, and loads of publishers did turn it down. After about a year of trudging round round I gave up." In 1997 she pitched up at what was then Reed, now Egmont, but by this time had taken the idea out of her portfolio, too embarrassed by its failure to excite. "They asked me if I'd ever thought about writing. I said I had, but the idea hadn't been very well received so far. They said send it in, as there might be something in it they could use."

There was. The book she'd been carrying around all that time was called *I Wish I Was a Dog* and it was published a year later, by Mammoth, with no changes. Monks doesn't have to contend with magazine and newspaper deadlines any more. She now writes her own stories and works for a stellar roster of other writers as well, illustrating books by Karen McCombie, Jeanne Willis, Roger McGough and Julia Donaldson.

Her work-in-progress includes two books with McCombie in a new, as-yet untitled 10+ series for Walker; Willis' *Little Big Mouse* novelty monster book also for Walker; the third in Julia Donaldson's *Princess Mirror-Belle* series, and the roughs for a new Donaldson picture book, both for Macmillan. And her latest book for Egmont, *Spider*, has sold more than 28,000 copies. Despite all that, and baby too, she also managed to produce a whole portfolio of distinctive and full-of-life illustrations which will help to celebrate the eight World Book Day on 3 March.